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IBSEN'S *FRUEN FRA HAVET* AND MOLBECH'S
KLINTEKONGENS BRUD

Woerner in his book on Ibsen¹ sums up what is generally known of the influences upon this author finding expression in *Fruen fra havet* (1888). All that is here brought together seems abundantly substantiated and in turn contributes materially to the understanding of this difficult drama. One influence seems to me to be omitted, one which in a sense comprehends the others and within which they first find vital function. This is the romantic lyrical drama *Klintekongens Brud* by Chr. K. F. Molbech (1845), which must have made its impression upon Ibsen in his younger romantic period, an impression perhaps unconsciously reproductive in the symbolistic content of his much later work.² The personal relations of the two poets, as gathered from Ibsen's letters were as follows: They first met in Rome in 1865,³ where they developed relations of cordial friendship,⁴ in letters addressing each other with "du." The friendship was put to a severe test in 1877⁵ by the question of precedence in theatrical presentation of Ibsen's *Samfundets støtter* over Molbech's *Ambrosius*, but the test was happily met by Molbech's dedication of his new work to Ibsen.⁶ In expressing his appreciation of this evidence of Molbech's generosity Ibsen speaks of his poetry in general as if he were perfectly familiar with it, as an earlier letter⁷ in fact bears witness to his acquaintance with Molbech's translation of Dante's *Divina commedia*, published 1851-63. There is then no reason to doubt that Ibsen was well acquainted with *Klintekongens Brud*. Later on Ibsen's *Gengangere* appears to have been the rock upon which the friendship finally broke.⁸

¹ *Henrik Ibsen*, II, 204ff. 1910; ed. 2, 206ff. 1912.

² J. Collin (*Henrik Ibsen*, 518. 1910) has seen that Ibsen's drama presupposes a romantic prototype.

³ *Breve fra Henrik Ibsen*, I, 101.

⁴ I, 152. 1867; II, 34. 1875.

⁵ II, 53ff., 227f.

⁶ II, 60, 229.

⁷ I, 244. 1872.

⁸ II, 98, 236f. 1882.

The similarity of the two works lies in the strange attachment of the heroine in either case for the spirit of the sea. In Molbech's poem this spirit finds incorporation in the romantic "Klinterkongen," who frequents the chalk-cliff (*Klint*) on the Danish island of Møen. A suggested motivation for the attachment of Anna for this being is given in the fact that she had been found as a child in a chest washed ashore from a stranded ship at the foot of the cliff, her parentage being unknown. Popular belief had it that in time of storm Klinterkongen drove with his four black horses over the sea and brought destruction to every ship met on his way. Long ago a nobleman's daughter, named Anna, who lived near the cliff and who was of a restless disposition, had gone out one evening to drink from the spring, where Klinterkongen appeared to her in the form of a huntsman and seduced her. At the birth of her daughter she was herself found dead. In following generations each third daughter similarly became the victim of Klinterkongen, until finally the noble family moved to foreign parts over the sea, but the belief was held that nowhere could it be safe from Klinterkongen. The Anna of the poem has the name and other characteristics of the unfortunate Annas who have gone before, and she also meets an unknown huntsman in the evening at the spring. All points inevitably to the conclusion that Anna is a doomed third daughter of the noble family, and she herself interprets the restless longing of her soul as the impossibility of finding peace on earth, which was characteristic of the descendants of Klinterkongen. So difficult is in fact the transition to strictly human relations that she repels the huntsman when he reveals himself as a fugitive knight, and insists that her troth is plighted with no other than Klinterkongen. The difficulty is, however, but temporary and the heroine finds her indefinable longing happily resolved into love for the human knight, and is even willing, if need be, to leave the sea, the woods and the chalk-cliff in order to follow him. A happy arrangement makes this renunciation unnecessary.

In Ibsen's drama it is also the heroine, Fru Ellida Wangel, who has the inexplicable longing for the sea. As a child she

had lived in a light-house on the coast and the open sea had so become a part of her nature that even life in the inner recesses of the fjord was well nigh intolerable. The spirit of the sea is again incorporated in a quasi-human being, a man who appeared originally under the symbolical name of Friman, who took on later among others the alias Alfred Johnston, who had been associated with Finland, Finmarken, America, etc., a sailor with whom Ellida (her father had given her a ship's name) had once betrothed herself and to whom she feels herself irresistibly drawn without being able to account for the fact. Her marriage to Doctor Wangel, a widower with two daughters, had not brought an end to her attachment for the sea and its human symbol, for in the Ibsen sense it was no marriage. She had simply sold herself, as she declares. When her husband is able to leave her absolutely free choice to follow the mysterious stranger, if it be her will, she is able to forsake him, her marriage becomes a real marriage, and what had seemed abnormal longing is resolved into normal human affection. There are further accessory details of similarity, perhaps partly inherent in the subject-matter—the mermaid with its longing as kin to the heroine, the suggestion of the sea in the eyes of the spirit symbolizing it, those of Klintekongen blue as the sea, those of Johnston, alias Friman, having an uncanny sea-like look, changing color as the sea does in varying weather.

Against the hypothesis of a close relation of the two dramas various considerations may be raised. It may be said that there is after all little similarity between them, which is in most particulars decidedly true. The folklore appeal may be made. That the essential basis of Molbech's poem is folkloristic is undubitable. The same is hardly in equal measure the case with Ibsen's play. Even if the possibility of independent use of the same or related folkloristic material were to be considered, the similarity lies rather in the way in which it is treated, the poetic idea that the woman not fully conscious of the as yet impersonal yearning of love within her heart associates it with the sea (including the landscape immediately connected therewith), transferring it then to a being who for

her impersonates the sea, but who is calculated to bring to her only further stress or final disaster. Through the eventual transition to the voluntary bestowal of her affection upon a human object she reaches true happiness and harmony of mind. Her vague yearning has been resolved into real love.

The points of difference are of the sort characteristic of Ibsen and reveal how he has employed the idea in a somewhat didactic way. The affection of the woman has to be transferred to her own husband, and this can be done only as she is allowed by him absolute liberty of self-disposal. She feels that she had not had such liberty in the first instance, or if she had had it, at any rate had not properly used it. Lacking it, she could have no real love for her husband, and the conviction that such was the case had come overwhelmingly upon her when a child was born which appeared to her to have the eyes of shifting sea-color characteristic of Friman-Johnston. With full recognition on the part of both husband and wife of the fundamental importance of liberty with concomitant responsibility their union is raised from the level of a mere contract to that of a real marriage.

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